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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 14, 1999

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State Moves to Prevent Increase in Teen Driving Fatalities

(SACRAMENTO, CA - October 14, 1997) Teen traffic deaths could increase significantly over the next decade, according to a study released today which projects a one third increase in the number of California teenagers.

A collaboration of state government agencies has announced a series of initiatives designed to respond to the massive increase in teenage drivers. In addition, last Wednesday, Governor Pete Wilson signed into law SB 1329. This graduated licensing legislation will place added restrictions on the driving privileges of teens starting July 1, 1998.

"We are taking steps today to prevent future tragedies on our roadways," says Arthur Anderson, Director of the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). "Where public safety is involved we have to be pro-active."

The study, sponsored by the OTS, projects a significant rise in deaths and injuries as the teen population grows in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the overall population.

According to Anderson, whose career spans more than 20 years in law enforcement, teens are far more likely to be involved in traffic collisions than any other age group. A surge in the teen population -- the echo of the baby boom -- will vastly increase the number of teenage drivers over the next ten years.

Large numbers of children were born between 1980 and 1993 due to delayed child bearing by Baby Boomers. High levels of immigration by predominantly young families and high birth rates among minorities have also contributed to what is often referred to as "Generation Y.". The trend is national but more pronounced in California.

A 16-year-old is twenty times more likely to be killed in an auto collision than an adult, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). According to the

California Highway Patrol sixteen year olds were at fault in two-thirds of the collisions they were involved in last year.

This month the OTS will sponsor a series of community forums throughout California seeking suggestions from groups which have worked successfully with teens.

The OTS is also providing grants to the California Department of Justice to develop public service campaign materials and to the California Highway Patrol to enhance current programs targeting teens.

Efforts are underway to recruit private and non-profit organizations into the effort, creating what Anderson anticipates will be a broad-based, public-private partnership.

"This is an important challenge," he notes, "that can best be met by forming partnerships that include government agencies, grassroots community organizations and the private sector."

Motor vehicle crashes kill more teens than any other cause, and alcohol is involved in one third of all fatal collisions, according to a co-sponsor of the study, the California Coalition Against Driving Under the Influence (CaDUI). The study predicts that by the end of the decade there could be a 24 percent increase in deaths involving alcohol among 15, 16 and 17-year-old drivers.

Motor vehicle deaths and injuries have dropped significantly in California over the past decade, attributed by traffic safety officials to law enforcement efforts, tough anti-drunk driving laws, and mandatory use of seat belts and motorcycle helmets.

The full study is available to the public at the OTS world wide web site (www.ots.org/ots). The mission of the Office of Traffic Safety, a part of California's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, is to reduce deaths, injuries and collisions that cause property damage on California's roadways.

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RETURN TO THE YOUTHQUAKE MENU